

rural new york minute

ISSUE NUMBER 30/JUNE 2009

For New Yorkers, it's all about the Economy

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What is the Issue?

The current recession has had dramatic impacts across the globe. Upstate New York, which has been weathering economic woes of its own for decades, has not been spared. After a decades-long social and economic transformation that left the upstate region in a particularly weak economic position, this recent slump has produced a massive state budget deficit as well as rising unemployment. New York City has traditionally been viewed as the economic engine of the state, yet it too has taken a severe hit, particularly in the financial services sector.

How do New Yorkers rank economic issues in relation to other concerns? How do upstate urban residents compare with their downstate counterparts? What do rural New Yorkers consider important? And, have these views changed over the past year?

To answer these questions we examine data from the 2008 and 2009 Empire State Poll, an annual telephone survey of NYS residents conducted each February by the Survey Research Institute at Cornell University. Specifically, we contrast survey responses to the following questions: "In your opinion, what do you think is the single most important issue facing *your community* as a whole?," and "In your opinion, what do you think is the single most important issue facing *New York State* as a whole?"

Important Community Issues

New Yorkers identified Taxes, Economic Growth, and Employment as the most important issues affecting their communities in 2008 (see Figure 1 and

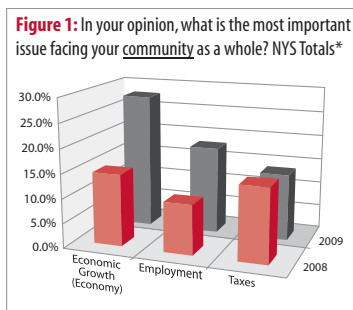


Table 1). These three issues were by far the most frequently cited out of fifteen different issues recorded. In 2009, almost twice the proportion of respondents identified Economic Growth as the most important issue. Employment also increased in importance, while the importance of taxes remained relatively stable. Downstate urban residents were much less likely than their upstate urban or rural counterparts to identify Employment as a concern in both time periods,

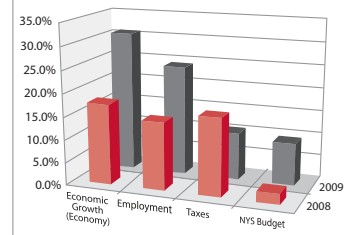
Table 1: In your opinion, what is the most important issue facing your community as a whole? By geographic residence category, 2008 and 2009.*

	NY State		Downstate Urban		Upstate Urban		Rural	
	2008	2009	2008	2009	2008	2009	2008	2009
Economic Growth (Economy)	14.7%	27.7%	11.0%	26.1%	19.8%	34.0%	21.3%	26.2%
Employment	10.1%	17.9%	7.5%	13.9%	12.6%	23.6%	15.4%	25.9%
Taxes	15.1%	13.6%	10.4%	9.9%	24.3%	18.7%	21.7%	20.3%
Subtotal	39.9%	59.2%	28.9%	49.9%	56.7%	76.3%	58.4%	72.4%

Important State Issues

When asked about issues facing New York State as a whole, the responses shifted somewhat. In 2008, Economic Growth, Taxes, and Employment were again the top three issues identified, but by 2009 the relative proportion of respondents identifying these issues had shifted dramatically (see Figure 2 and Table 2). In addition, the NYS Budget was a fourth issue that ranked close in importance to Taxes in 2009. The percentages of New Yorkers who identified Economic Growth and Employment increased significantly between 2008 and 2009, Taxes declined in relative

Figure 2: In your opinion, what is the most important issue facing New York State as a whole? NYS Totals*



importance over the time period, whereas the proportion identifying the NYS Budget as the most important issue almost quadrupled. Of all New Yorkers, downstate urban respondents were more likely to identify Economic Growth and Employment as the major issues facing NYS, although these issues were still significant for their upstate urban and rural counterparts. Upstate urban and rural respondents were significantly more

Table 2: In your opinion, what is the most important issue facing New York State as a whole? By geographic residence category, 2008 and 2009.*

	NY State		Downstate Urban		Upstate Urban		Rural	
	2008	2009	2008	2009	2008	2009	2008	2009
Economic Growth (Economy)	17.7%	30.7%	16.8%	34.9%	18.0%	24.6%	17.0%	23.8%
Employment	14.9%	24.1%	15.2%	26.9%	14.6%	18.5%	15.0%	20.9%
Taxes	17.0%	10.5%	9.4%	3.1%	29.2%	21.8%	30.4%	23.8%
NYS Budget	2.4%	9.4%	2.4%	7.7%	1.7%	11.8%	3.3%	12.2%
Subtotal	52.0%	74.7%	43.8%	72.6%	63.5%	76.7%	65.7%	80.7%

Conclusions

According to these data from the Empire State Poll, New Yorkers are increasingly concerned about economic challenges such as economic growth, employment, taxes, and the state budget. Downstate urbanites, in particular, show markedly increased concern since just last year about these economic issues, although upstate urban and rural residents point to the same issues as critical. And, while upstate urbanites view economic growth and employment as particularly vital issues to their *communities*, downstate urban residents are more apt to see these issues as significant for the *state as a whole*. ▲

* Sources for data in the Tables and Figures is the Cornell University Empire State Poll and CaRDI Rural Survey, 2008 and 2009.

